

ARMAGEDDON

A SERMON

Upon the War

Preached in Norwich Cathedral

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ARMAGEDDON

And they gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.—REV. xvi. 16. ✓

I HAVE chosen my text from the description of the great battle at the end of the world foretold by St. John, not merely because the war in which we are engaged is a war of many nations, but because the issues at stake are the final issues ; those which will one day be the only issues to be settled, as they are now the only issues of importance ; the supreme issue of good and evil, right and wrong. St. John took the name he gave to this last great battle from that historic fight in the plains of Megiddo, when Barak under the inspiration of the prophetess Deborah led the Israelites to a complete victory over the terrible Canaanites. The Israelites were few, and the Canaanites were many ; moreover, as the historian tells us, they had “ nine hundred chariots of iron ” ; but the cause of Israel, despite their back-sliding, was the cause of God, and He championed them to victory.

"The Kings came and fought; then fought the Kings of Canaan by the waters of Megiddo.

"They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

"The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon." *

In the new battle of Megiddo, at the end of the world, which St. John describes, all the good forces of the world are arrayed on one side, and all the evil forces, inspired by the Beast and the False Prophet, on the other, and then the evil is completely overwhelmed and destroyed.

Now it may seem that in daring to speak of our present terrible war as an Armageddon, I am falling into a kind of blasphemy not uncommon when nations go to war; and a familiar theme of satire. In every war, it is said, both sides appeal to God as though He were merely their national deity, pledged to fight for His own people. We all remember that when some victory was gained by the Crown Prince's army, the Emperor of Germany telegraphed, "How magnificently God supported him!" The teaching of the Bible, however, on this matter is very plain. In the time of the prophet Amos, the Israelites were entirely confident that Jehovah was supporting them, because they had gained some victories

* Judges v. 19-21.

over Damascus ; but Amos assured them that, on the contrary, God was bringing up the Assyrian army against them, because of their cruelty and injustice. He said to them, “ Prepare to *meet* thy God, O Israel.” God was not leading them to victory. He was at the head of their enemies ; and they would have to meet Him in battle. The lessons which Amos tried to teach the people of Israel—lessons which it is to be hoped we have learned—were first, that God is not the God of any one nation exclusively, however much he may have favoured it and chosen it for some special work in the world ; and secondly, that He is a God of righteousness, Who will punish all nations alike for their wickedness. Consequently, in any war in which we are engaged, the one question of paramount importance is, on which side is the God of righteousness ? There is a fine story told about Abraham Lincoln in the American Civil War,* which puts this point plainly. He was asked whether he was sure that God was on his side ; and his reply was : “ I have not thought about that ; but I am very anxious to know whether we are on God’s side.” That is the question of consequence ; and on that point it behoves us all to have a clear mind and conscience. May I

* Quoted in the *Spectator*.

give you the reasons which constrain me to believe that we are on God's side in this war, and that we are justified in speaking of it as an Armageddon, and in claiming the divine assurance of ultimate victory, through whatever chastening discipline we may be led ?

(1) My first reason is that this is, on our side, a war against war ; a war on behalf of peaceful arbitration. When individual men quarrel and cannot make up their dispute they are no longer allowed to fight it out, they must go to law, and the side that is beaten at law must accept the decision ; the Government of the country compels him to accept it. But when nations quarrel, there is no Government above them all that can compel them not to fight ; and as long as nations remain free there can be no such Government over them. The possibility of wars is part of the price that we pay for national freedom. When the Roman Empire was mistress of the world, it could and did prevent the subject nations from fighting, and the " Roman peace " kept the civilised world from war for many centuries. But the nations under the Roman Empire were not free ; they had no power of self-government ; they were ruled by magistrates sent from Rome, who might be honest men, but might quite as likely be men like Pilate and Felix and Festus,

of whom we read in the New Testament. In recent years it has been suggested that nations, instead of going to war, should submit their disputes to the arbitration of judges from neutral nations, and we can all remember the great hopes which attended the setting up of the tribunal at The Hague. But clearly nations cannot be compelled to submit their differences to arbitration except by going to war with them. Now, the little nation of Servia appealed to The Hague Tribunal against two of Austria's demands, while accepting all the rest ; it was just such a case as The Hague Tribunal was appointed to meet ; but Austria, backed by Germany, refused to allow the appeal, and declared war. *Clearly, then, Russia and France and England are fighting in this war for the cause of arbitration against brute force ; they are fighting for international justice, for the extension of the Kingdom of God over the kingdoms of the world ; and if this war ends, as we trust in the God of righteousness that it will end, in the victory of the Allies, the cause of arbitration must have better success in the future.*

(2) In the second place, this war is a war on God's side, because it is a war for truth, for the sacredness of pledges. When France and Germany were on the verge of war, the question was put to each of them by our Foreign Minister

whether they would respect the neutrality of Belgium, because obviously it was to the advantage of both to make their way into the other's territory through the country of Belgium. France agreed; Germany refused. And we have since heard of the astonishment expressed by the German Chancellor that England should think it worth while to go to war with Germany for breaking her pledge. He called it going to war "for a scrap of paper." Now realise what that expression means. From time immemorial agreements between individuals and nations have been written down on parchment or paper, and signed or sealed. The most solemn obligations ever entered into by men or nations—our Magna Charta, or our Declaration of Rights—might be described as "scraps of paper." That is all they would be to a savage. But a civilised man regards them as the most sacred things in the world. How could society hold together if a promise which a man signed to-day he laughed at to-morrow as a mere "scrap of paper"? \

When Belgium was made an independent kingdom, its neutrality was guaranteed by the Great Powers; and that guarantee was ratified before the Franco-Prussian war in 1870.*

* The charge is sometimes made that the English indignation at the invasion of Belgian neutrality is

Now, because it proves inconvenient to Germany, she repudiates her obligation, and smiles at the simple-minded people who expected her to keep it, when it was inconvenient. < This is to undo all the work of civilisation, by which the human race has been slowly raised above savagery. But worse even than that, it is to undo all the work of religion. The name by which God has revealed Himself to us is the God of truth ; the God Who keeps promise ; the God of the Covenant. And therefore for a king or his people to claim the support of God at the same time that they break the most solemn covenant is either hypocrisy, or it means that the God whom they worship is not the God Whom Christians worship. >

(3) In the present case, it may be the latter. Indeed, this contempt for international justice, this contemptuous repudiation of solemn pledges are only striking symptoms, to which the progress of the war has largely added, of a definite renunciation of Christianity among the ruling classes in modern Germany. Germany is no longer a Christian country, and does not recognise Christian standards, either in peace

affected. It may be well then to remember that the feeling was no less strong in 1870 when that neutrality seemed threatened, as appears plainly from a cartoon in *Punch* for August 13th, that year.

or war. Her religion is now a religion of Force, with Falsehood as an ally. >A brilliant teacher of history, recently dead, who knew modern German literature and the modern German temper better than any other Englishman, quotes in his last book from a German writer their new beatitudes as follows : “ Ye have heard how in old times it was said, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth ; but I say unto you, Blessed are the valiant for they shall make the earth their throne. And ye have heard men say, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven ; but I say unto you, Blessed are the great in soul and the free in spirit, for they shall enter into Valhalla. And ye have heard men say, Blessed are the peacemakers ; but I say unto you, Blessed are the war makers, for they shall be called, if not the children of Jehovah, the children of Odin, who is greater than Jehovah ! ” * In plain words this writer tells us that the leaders of the German people have refused to accept any longer a religion which comes to them from the despised Jews, and have deliberately gone back to their own ancestral religion, that of the war-gods, Odin and Thor. It may not be possible to find in

* “ Germany and England,” by Prof. J. A. Cramb, p. 117.

many books* so clearly tabulated a creed as that which I have read ; but you will find many statements of faith which come to the same thing. You may not find God appealed to by the name of Odin or of Thor, but when God is named, the only attributes you will generally find ascribed to Him, are those of Power and Intelligence ; not Righteousness and not Pity.

⟨ The modern German says : We are the best race of men on the earth, the strongest, the bravest, the most intelligent ; no nation is so warlike, or so scientific ; “ We are the best colonists, the best sailors, the best merchants.” The future of civilisation therefore depends upon us, and us only. God clearly intends to bless the world by us, as in times past He blessed it in some respects by the Greeks, in others by the Romans. We are now the chosen people. We must therefore gain the mastery of the world, so that our civilisation may spread through the world. Nothing must stand in the way of our mission. The beneficent end justifies any means, even the most aggressive and treacherous and bloody war. That is what the German Emperor meant when he said, “ Our German people will be the granite block, on which the good God may complete

* See *Friedrich Nietzsche* by M. A. Mügge (T. C. & E. C. Jack).

His work of civilising the world." The conquest of the world is therefore put forward as the first duty of the German people ; the second duty is to give it the blessing of German civilisation. You will remember that this was the policy suggested to our blessed Lord by the devil at the opening of His ministry ; a policy which He instantly rejected with a "Get thee behind me, Satan." We can understand that if the mission of Christ was to put His divine spirit into the hearts of all men, that spirit of His would have become an altogether different spirit, if He had decided to win them by the sword instead of by the Cross ! His spirit could have been then neither the spirit of righteousness nor the spirit of love. The spirit of the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep is a very different spirit from that of the wolf. And so our reply to the claim of Germany must surely be this :—We acknowledge your admirable intelligence ; for your poets of a century ago, before you abjured Christianity, we have a high respect ; for your Christian musicians, like Bach, we have a high respect ; we have respect for your thoroughness in science, and are glad to learn of you. But your new religion of anti-Christ, your new God of Force and Falschood, your new doctrine that self-interest

is the only right, we loathe and abominate. Do you tell us that you will give the world civilisation, when you have hacked your way to power? Why, in the process you will have renounced all the civilisation you ever had. You have already trampled under your armed feet everyting that raised humanity above the brutes. Belgium devastated, pillaged, its people massacred or homeless, its most ancient and beautiful city burnt to the ground, is an object-lesson to the world of the new civilisation you have in store for them. It is a civilisation without liberty, without justice, without chivalry. It is civilisation, like that of the ancient Canaanite, in honour of whose god women were debauched, and children thrown into the fire. Nay, it is worse, for they knew no better, and, indeed, their chariots of iron were used only against opposing armies; while your bombs are used against peaceful citizens, your mines are laid in the path of quiet fisherfolk and merchantmen; and you reckon up the tale of your slaughtered peasants as though they were merely a huntsman's prey. No, in the name of freedom, in the name of justice, in the name of truth, in the name of humanity—which are all names of our God, we will fight to our last drop of blood against you, and may God defend the right!)

(It is a holy war in which we have taken

our part ; a war of Christ against anti-Christ. Our young men, who at the eleventh hour are coming forward to fight against the common enemy, must come in the spirit of crusaders. I take it as of good omen that our two cross-bearers here in the mother church have enlisted ; for the battle is indeed for the Cross, " against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world," and it must be waged in the spirit of the Cross. It is a great and holy thing to fight for one's country, and we thank God that large numbers of the enemy of the simpler sort, who know nothing of the causes of the war, have this consolation ; they are fighting for their country ; they are fighting, we must think, with a good conscience, though the orders they carry out may be devil's orders.

In our case the patriotic motive, strong and deep as it is, is strengthened and purified by a still deeper motive ; (we are fighting for others as well as for ourselves, for the weak against the strong, for right against might, for Christ against anti-Christ. And so the battle is not only ours, it is God's, it is indeed Armageddon. Ranged against us are the Dragon and the False Prophet ;) but the issue is sure.

The arrows of Almighty God are drawn !
 Angels of death stand in the low'ring heavens !
 Soldiers, prepare ; our cause is heaven's cause ;
 Soldiers, prepare ; be worthy of our cause.

And we others, who from age or sex or infirmity cannot be soldiers, we also must be worthy of our cause. We must help the good cause in all ways that are possible ; and we can all help in one way, at least, by keeping a strong heart to endure and an open hand to relieve distress. Let us not expect to avoid suffering. Europe cannot be saved without suffering. We are signed with the Cross, and the Cross means suffering. It cost much to redeem men's souls. Moreover, we can all help also, by refusing to hinder. For example, we may strengthen the hands of our magistrates in their effort to remove temptations from the path of our young soldiers. Their cause is a divine cause ; but they are only men and perhaps hardly that ; and why should we allow the snares of intemperance and sensuality to be strewn in their way ? I would appeal especially to Christian women. Do not let the sacred cause in which we are engaged be dragged through the mire, by the shameless animalism of the undisciplined girls in your city. (I appeal also to parents and wives. You too may help by refusing to hinder. Do not try to hold back your sons and husbands from giving their young strength and enthusiasm to the great cause. Remember that the war is being waged in defence of everything

that you hold dear, everything that makes life worth living ; in defence of freedom, justice, honour, religion. It is a battle for God and His Christ.) And Christ may well be saying now, as He said two thousand years ago to all selfish or double-minded Christians : " He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me " (St. Matt. x. 37). If we would fight in the Lord's battle, we must pray Him to purify our hearts.

[September 6th, 1914.]